

The other change I would propose would be to eliminate the term “junior NCO.” It has always sounded peculiar and somewhat childish to me. It would sound much better to have either NCOs or senior NCOs (Staff NCOs). The structure I envision would be: Private (E1), Private First Class (E2), Lance Corporal (E3); Corporal (E4); Sergeant (E5); Staff Sergeant (E6); Sergeant First Class (E7); Master Sergeant./First Sergeant (E8); Segreant Major/Command Segreant Major (E9). As stated previously, the insignia would remain unchanged with the exception of dropping that of specialist.

My final comment is that if we no longer refer to our NCOs as such because of the “non” in noncommissioned, then you also eliminate the “officer” and along with it, some of the basis for an NCO’s authority as a leader of Soldiers.

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## Eliminate specialist rank

I found it interesting that Sgt. Maj. Vasquez recommended changing the rank structure. During my tour in Germany from 1988-92, I submitted a suggestion through the suggestion program (which was returned because it had no monetary value) that the rank of specialist be eliminated and that they adopt the rank of corporal first class - two stripes and one rocker to indicate the NCO between corporal and corporal first class. Unlike Sgt. Maj. Vasquez’s suggestion, this change would be less dramatic (not having to learn an entire new rank structure) and elimination of the current specialist rank would bring all the ranks to a more standardized and symmetrical look.

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## What makes an NCO?

There are many Soldiers that don’t really know the difference between a sergeant and a noncommissioned officer. Although it might sound like these are one and the same, there is a difference. Sergeant is a word defining rank. As you well know, this title might come along with time in service or promotion points. Sure, a Soldier might have to go before a promotion board or even attend [the] Primary Leadership Development Course, but one can still do the bare minimum and achieve this much. It takes more to be a true NCO.

First and foremost, an NCO is a leader of Soldiers. This doesn’t necessarily mean that this individual has Soldiers who fall under him/her or is in charge of a certain operation, section or detail. A true NCO knows his/her Soldiers and will ALWAYS put the Soldiers’ needs before his or her own. The NCO Creed starts off with the statement “No one is more professional than I.” To be an NCO is to constantly be in the spotlight. You’re truly being watched from all angles. From the wear of the uniform, to military customs and courtesies, to technical knowledge in a given field, junior enlisted all around are watching, listening and looking at the NCOs for guidance. No

one else can do this. It’s up to the true NCOs to step up their game and lead the way.

Second, an NCO strives to remain tactically and technically proficient. This means that although the individual might have taken an administrative role that comes with the rank, his or her Soldiers should still be able to look up to that leader for ways to improve the way the Soldier gets the job done. This goes back to constantly being in the spotlight. It is the NCO’s responsibility as the leader to stay proficient and up to date in his or her line of work.

Finally, all Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership. This is not requested. It’s demanded. Not just demanded by lower enlisted Soldiers throughout the United States Army, but also by other NCOs that serve along with you. There’s only one type of Soldier that can proudly say that he or she is a member of a time-honored corps. It’s not the commissioned officer or even the sergeant. Only the noncommissioned officer is known as “The Backbone of the Army.”

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## Ralston’s Tao of Combat Leadership

Since I was young, I have been a student of history, military history in particular. From reading about battles past and the commanders who led them, I have noted certain points of combat leadership.

❑ Personal responsibility – If you are the one in charge, then you are the one responsible. This is true from generals to privates. Those that do not want responsibility are in the wrong profession.

❑ Study history – History, new and old, continues to play a major role in military decisions, at least it should. The key to everyone (every country, culture, etc.) has been – and always will be – history. History provides trends, tactics, customs, schools of thought, etc. Not only the enemies, but also *our* history is important. There is no sense in paying for the same lessons twice.

❑ Warriorship – Warriorship is actually a simple attribute that few possess and even fewer understand. It is simply the act of executing the personal discipline to accomplish the mission and to be prepared for any mission, no matter when it comes. That means exercising while others sleep in, studying while others play; it is the difference between influencing the world around you [or] letting the world control you.

Warriorship is not a nine-to-five job; it is a way of life. Empower your troops as warriors. A warrior soul, coupled with a superbly conditioned body and a sharp, analyzing mind, is what wins wars.

❑ Training – Training must be hard and realistic. Hard training sucks, but it saves lives. Battle drills must be run like clockwork, and every Soldier must know [his] job. Be satisfied when the troops’ potential meets their actions. Training helps the troops’ confidence, cohesion and morale. By setting high standards, troops will meet those standards and be better prepared mentally as well as physically to fight.